

## SECTION 5: WATER QUALITY POLICY

### Background

Pollutants are discharged to the state's surface waters each day in treated wastewater, known as **point source pollution**. Georgia has been managing these wastewater treatment plant discharges for more than 35 years, and doing so with a high degree of success. Today, far more contamination is washed into rivers and streams by runoff from non-point sources during and after storm events than is delivered to the waters of the state by point sources. As the population grows and more land is converted to urban uses, the amounts of pollutants sent to our streams via urban runoff will likely dramatically increase unless **stormwater** and land disturbance are managed more effectively. Water quality standards are a crucial element of Georgia's water quality protection programs. Under the federal Clean Water Act, the state has established water quality standards, which are periodically reviewed to ensure that the correct standards are in place and that the standards are appropriate for the areas of the state in which they are applied. Before establishing or revising water quality standards, the technical means for reduction of pollution and the associated economic factors are considered.

Streams and rivers are able to assimilate a portion of the pollution they receive. However, their ability to assimilate pollutants is limited. In Georgia, there are over 6,000 miles of streams that do not meet water quality standards. Most impairments are caused by non-point source pollution. National and state water quality protection policies do not allow discharges to exceed the assimilative capacities of water. In many areas across the state, however, growth and urbanization of rural lands is happening faster than state and local governments are able to develop and implement the management practices required to minimize non-point source water pollution and maintain assimilative capacity.

Clean water and its assimilative capacity provide values and opportunities to current and future Georgians. Protecting those values and opportunities will require that appropriate standards are used in assessing the status and condition of Georgia's waters. It will also require a better understanding of the assimilative capacity of Georgia's waters, and of the management practices that can be implemented to assure point and non-point source discharges do not exceed those assimilative capacities or cause water quality violations.

To fully implement the water quality policy, wasteload allocation procedures for point source discharges will be updated to assess current and future needs for assimilative capacity on a watershed basis and to identify gaps between future assimilative capacity needs and the assimilative capacity available to meet those needs. The Division will establish new water quality standards for surface waters where appropriate, with revisions to the fecal coliform and dissolved oxygen standards currently under consideration. The Division will also assess the ways in which activities on land, and the ways in which land is developed, affect water quality and assimilative capacity.

Any gap between forecasted needs for assimilative capacity and the assimilative capacity that is available will be addressed by the selection of appropriate management practices. These practices will have the goals of managing assimilative capacity on a watershed basis, restoring impaired waters, and/or protecting waters that are not yet impaired. As with the water quantity policy, the water quality management practices would be implemented at a local level to address the unique conditions affecting water quality in specific areas.

### Water Quality Policy

- (1) In concert with the integrated water policy, the State of Georgia will manage point and non-point source pollution on a watershed basis to provide for the protection of water quality, the restoration of impaired waters and the management of assimilative capacity for current and future uses and users.

### Implementation Actions

On the state level, the EPD will implement the water quality management policy through its current statutory authority and rules related to setting water quality standards, controlling water pollution and issuing discharge permits. Under this plan, the EPD will take the following actions:

- (1) In accordance with O.C.G.A. §12-5-23(c)(9), the Board of Natural Resources will establish the surface water quality standards necessary to ensure that water use classifications and water quality criteria are adequate to protect public health and maintain or restore the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the of the state's waters, now and in the future.
- (2) In accordance with O.C.G.A. §§12-5-23-(c)(2), 12-5-30-(a), and 12-5-30-(b), the Director is responsible for managing pollution to Georgia's waters to protect public health and to ensure the physical, chemical and biological integrity of those waters, now and in the future. This requires the implementation of management practices to protect waters that currently attain water quality standards and restore waters whose physical, chemical, or biological integrity are impaired.
- (3) In accordance with O.C.G.A. §§12-5-23-(c)(2), 12-5-30-(a), and 12-5-30-(b), the Director will manage assimilative capacity on a watershed basis using forecasts of future discharge needs within a watershed and **conditions** in permits to assure compliance with water quality standards, in accordance with section 6 of this plan.
- (4) Subsequent to the Division's determination of the conditions for permits to assure compliance with water quality standards in a watershed, the Division will provide said conditions as guidance for production of a water development and conservation plan for the **water planning region** in which that watershed lies. Following adoption of a water development and conservation plan, the Director will incorporate said conditions in permits for facilities or operations discharging pollutants in the water planning region.